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31 May 1979

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: The Italian Communist Party: Its Role in the Election and After

Introduction

Although the following paper talks about the Italian election scheduled for Sunday and Monday, it really is more about what is likely to happen after the vote. The relative performance of the various parties will of course affect the post-election bargaining, but there are other longer-term considerations at play, including Italy's massive economic problems, which are likely to have equal or greater influence as the parties sort out their options. [redacted]

Nevertheless, this is probably the most important Italian election so far in the 1970s, because it will inevitably be seen as the country's verdict on a unique phase of its postwar political history: the 1976-79 period of Communist-Christian Democratic cooperation, which saw the two parties come as close as they have since 1947 to sharing seats in the cabinet--but which broke down when stiff resistance to this rapprochement developed in both parties. [redacted]

The longer-term factors pushing the Christian Democrats and Communists together will be especially important if, as most estimates suggest, the election does not produce a dramatic shift in party strengths. Most polls and the private estimates of politicians have the ruling Christian Democrats--38.7 percent in the 1976 election--gaining several points and the Communists--34.4 percent in 1976--losing several. Whether this makes a significant difference

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in the political equation will be determined in large part by the performance of the Socialists and smaller parties. Most estimates doubt they will gain enough to give the Christian Democrats an effective and dependable alternative to cooperation with the Communists.

But there are enormous uncertainties in all of the estimates and that is the subject of the first part of this paper. The general conclusion of that part is that it will take an unexpectedly dramatic electoral shift to reverse the long-term trend toward cooperation between the two major parties. Moving on from that conclusion, the second part of the paper takes a detailed look at where the PCI stands today on issues of major concern to the US and its allies.

The paper was commissioned by an inter-agency working group, cochaired by the NSC Staff and the State Department, as an input to its periodic review of developments in Western Europe. It was prepared under the auspices of the National Intelligence Officer for Western Europe by [redacted] the Office of Political Analysis [redacted] Inasmuch as the working group wished to have the independent views and judgments of a qualified expert in the area, the paper has not been formally coordinated within the National Foreign Assessment Center, Agency, or intelligence community.

The Election: Why It's Hard to Call

For a variety of reasons, the 3-4 June election is less predictable than most previous Italian elections. Throughout most of the postwar period the Italian electorate was among the most stable in Western Europe--a reflection in part of the extent to which cultural and social change lagged behind the economic and demographic revolutions of the 1950s and 1960s. The most noteworthy electoral features of that period were the stability of the Christian Democratic (DC) vote--hovering always within a point or two of 40 percent--and the steady but incremental growth of the Communist (PCI) vote, starting from 19 percent in 1946 and inching up to 26.9 percent in the late 1960s. In contest after contest, an analyst could feel fairly safe predicting that the Christian Democrats would be somewhere around 40 percent and that the Communists would probably gain a point or two. Except when allied with the Social Democrats, the Socialist Party stayed around 12-14 percent, while most of the smaller parties fluctuated within similar bands at a lower level.

But by the early 1970s, it was clear that something was changing in the electorate and that elections had become less predictable. The first tangible sign came in the early 1970s, when the neo-fascists made impressive gains in local elections and went on to score 8.7 percent in the 1972 parliamentary contest, doubling their vote and becoming the country's fourth largest party. There was speculation at the time about a resurgence of the right in Italy, but it is clear in retrospect--the neo-fascists have since dropped back close to their postwar average of 5 percent--that voters were merely groping for a way to protest governmental immobilism in the face of worsening social and economic conditions.

It soon became clear that the Communists would be the chief beneficiary of this sentiment. One factor working for them--the increasing secularization of Italian society--was illustrated vividly by the divorce referendum of 1974, in which voters endorsed legalized divorce by a landslide over the strong protestations of the Church and the Christian Democrats. Even with that warning, however, it came as a surprise to most observers when the Communist Party captured nearly a third of the vote the following year in nationwide municipal, provincial and regional elections.

In addition to secularization, the Communists had been aided by superior organization, by a new law allowing 18-year-olds to vote for the first time, and--at the international level--by the atmosphere of detente. But cutting across most of these factors and benefiting

the Communists more than anything else was the widespread feeling in Italy that everything was stalled--a mood the party caught perfectly in its campaign slogan: "Change Italy with the PCI."

It was therefore not surprising that in the 1976 parliamentary election, the party was able to repeat its 1975 performance. The parliamentary contest was essentially a replay of the local campaign a year earlier: the issues were the same, and not enough time had passed for the party to have either disappointed or rewarded its new supporters. In political terms, in fact, the Communists' local triumph had been little more than a run-up to the national contest.

The Current Complexities

Three years later, the calculus for the average Italian voter has become even more complex. Now there is a record on which to judge the Communists' ability to "change Italy" in positive ways. But it is a record obscured by a whole series of complications which must make it incredibly difficult for the average voter to form judgments about the parties' accountability for what has or has not happened.

Perhaps the major complicating factor is the governing formula that has prevailed since the last election. First the Communists propped up Andreotti's minority Christian Democratic government by abstaining in Parliament; later, in March 1978, they switched to outright support. Whether there was more than a symbolic difference between viewing the Communists as part of the government or merely as part of its majority often seemed more a theological than a political question--the occasion for endless hairsplitting on both sides. Essentially, the Christian Democrats claimed the Communists were outside the government--except when it suited them to associate the Communists with some difficult decision. And the Communists claimed they were in--except when they wanted to underline government ineptitude.

True, the nuances of the last three years have been set aside for the election campaign, which is proceeding in the usual no-holds-barred fashion. And many voters--the hard core of each party--will doubtless support their parties regardless of what is said. But one of the conclusions suggested by recent elections is that in the last 4 or 5 years a new group of "floating" voters, increasingly inclined to make up their minds on the basis of issues and performance, has gradually developed. Among these voters, those who endorsed the Communists for the first time

in 1976 will probably have the most difficult decision this year.*

Motives for supporting the Communists were multiple and complex, but most voters probably hoped their support would somehow lead to rapid and visible improvements. It can be argued that Italy would be in much worse shape today had the Communists remained in opposition, but the benefits of their cooperation with the government have not matched expectations created by their rhetoric. The country's overall economic situation has not improved dramatically, political terrorism has grown, and other long-neglected problems--the backward South is the classic case--still await solutions.**

But if the Communist Party's new supporters are disappointed, what are they do to? Do they return to their former parties, which seem no more dynamic or effective now than in 1976? Or do they stay with the Communists, accepting the party's argument that it is still the best hope for change in Italy--provided it has a more direct role in the government? Or do large numbers of these voters, say 3-4 percent of the electorate, do as the Communists fear and gravitate to the small Radical Party, whose aggressive civil rights campaigns have made the party a potential magnet for protest? The response of these voters is difficult to predict, not only because theirs is an inherently difficult choice but also because Italian voters have never had the question put in quite those terms; the 1976-79 period, with the Communists "half in and half out" of the government, has no precedent.

Such factors help explain the virtually unprecedented number of undecided voters this year--estimates range from 20 percent to 35 percent of the electorate. This ambivalence may also account for some of the

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*The PCI gained 7.2 percentage points in 1976. Giacomo Sani of Ohio State University calculates that about 3.2 percent came from 18-21 year-olds voting for the first time (of the 5.5 million voters in this category about 38-42 percent went to the PCI), about 2 percent were defectors from center or right parties such as the Christian Democrats, Social Democrats, Republicans, and Neo-Fascists, and approximately 2 percent transferred from the Socialist and smaller left-wing parties.

**The South is a particularly nagging problem for the PCI because its electoral surge in 1976 stemmed in large part from its strong gains there--gains that probably reflected hope that a stronger Communist Party could spur the government to action. Most current reports from the South suggest the PCI will take losses there this time.

seemingly contradictory trends in recent polls, such as the finding that the Communists will lose several percentage points and the Socialists will not gain much--but that there is growing public support for some kind of leftist government with or without the Christian Democrats.

What does all of this imply for the election outcome? It means we should view with caution the widespread assumption that the Christian Democrats will gain a few points and the Communists will lose a few points. That is still the best prediction given the evidence at hand--poll data and the random impressions of the Italian politicians. But the absence of evidence on how the undecided voters are sorting out their options leaves considerable room for surprise.

But No Matter What the Outcome...

There is in any case a more important question: is the election likely to change the political equation in ways that would reverse the long-term trend toward Christian Democratic-Communist collaboration?

The first point to make is that election results are only one of the factors that have encouraged that trend. Viewed from this perspective, the Communists have less to fear next week, because many other factors working in their favor are unlikely to be affected by anything other than an unexpected and precipitous drop in PCI votes.

Although the Communist Party's dramatic election gai since 1975 have given it momentum, many of the barriers to Communist government membership had begun to erode long before then.* And most of the factors working for the Communists before 1975 will still be operative after the election.

The economy, for example, will still be troubled by problems difficult to solve without Christian Democratic-Communist cooperation. The most visible symptoms of the economy's many structural problems are a soaring

public sector deficit and high wage costs. Any lasting solutions to these problems would inevitably touch the vital interests of both major parties: the Communists would have to risk their credibility with the party's labor base, and the Christian Democrats would have to lessen their dependence on public sector patronage as a source of political power.

Italy currently lacks a long-term program to deal with such problems. Treasury Minister Pandolfi's three-year plan was set aside during the political skirmishing that led up to the government crisis in January. In fact, so little attention has been given to economic affairs lately that monetary policy is the only economic tool available to the government at the moment.

Chances are the situation will be more serious by the time a new government is formed. For example, inflationary pressures will increase if labor succeeds in its effort to get around government guidelines on wages by wrapping up major contracts before the election. Oil prices, expected to rise at least 20 percent in dollar terms this year, will also underline the need for tougher austerity measures. And Italy's membership in the European Monetary System will also push domestic policy in the direction of austerity.

But just how important is Communist cooperation to solving Italy's economic problems? It would be misleading to suggest that the Communists can somehow "deliver" organized labor, or that Italy's problems are so threatening as to require immediate and comprehensive action. In fact, no Italian party has enough control over the unions--which are increasingly inclined to put bread-and-butter issues ahead of politics--to make them do what it wants. And anyone who has watched Italy survive a succession of seemingly mortal economic crises must be skeptical of doomsday predictions about the economy--which is not only remarkably elastic but is also extremely difficult to assess.*

Still, the economic problems are serious enough, and the next government cannot neglect them altogether. The steps it will have to take--measures at least as tough as the tax and public service hikes that Andreotti enacted two years ago--would be extremely difficult if organized labor fought them.

**A key to the economy's ability to withstand so much political mismanagement is the existence in Italy of an extensive "submerged economy." This submerged sector--powered by small and medium-sized firms that employ illegal labor--escapes much of the restraint imposed by government and unions on large industrial enterprises. The submerged sector is estimated to generate about 10 percent of national income.*

That is when the Communist factor will come into play--as it did when Andreotti passed his austerity program. The Communists did not so much "deliver" labor as provide the government a shock absorber for labor reaction. They endorsed austerity publicly and made an attempt to explain its rationale to the average worker. And the Communists were able to do this more credibly than other parties. While they do not control the unions, they have more influence than any other party, and Communist labor leaders such as Luciana Lama generally have more prestige among the workers than leaders affiliated with the Socialist, Christian Democratic or other parties.

The Communists, moreover, can exert influence not only by what they do but also by what they do not do. Through fairly strenuous exertions they helped keep labor quiescent; if they should do nothing--and a fortiori if they should encourage strikes and other actions--the government's ability to hold the line with labor would be in serious question. In short, the Communists' ability to "unleash" the unions is greater than their ability to "deliver" them. With their superior organization and discipline, the Communists have the potential to make labor disorders a much more disruptive phenomenon than at present. Of course they would have to be careful not to seem demogogic, but the party has always been able to choose issues and opponents so as to minimize that impression.

PCI Presence

But the importance of having the Communists aboard on any decision affecting labor reflects a more general phenomenon which is also not likely to be affected significantly by the election: the party's "presence" in so many areas of Italian life. The PCI is not a narrowly-based worker party--the socio-economic profile of its electorate nearly parallels that of the Christian Democrats.* And over the years it has built up a vast network of grass-roots organizations--neighborhood committees, factory councils, tenants' associations, and a myriad of others--which constitute the only direct contact many Italians have with a political party. (At the same time, the Christian Democrats' grass roots organizations

*The Communist electorate (with comparable figures for the Christian Democrats in parentheses): Unskilled workers and farm laborers, 41.6 percent (32 percent); skilled workers, farmers, 25.8 percent (31 percent); white collar workers, shopkeepers, artisans, small businessmen, 21.8 percent (22.5 percent); businessmen, executives, professionals, 10.8 percent (14.5 percent).

have become less effective, as rapid urbanization, for example, has diminished the effectiveness of Church-related groups in recruiting and mobilizing supporters.)

There are other more visible signs of Communist "presence," such as their dominant position in local governments covering more than half of Italy's population. But this merely reflects the party's success in slipping into the mainstream of Italian life--in contrast, for example, to the French Communists, who remain a narrowly based "culture within a culture." Even a drop of several percentage points in the election will not change one stubborn political fact: it is difficult for the Italian government to do anything important without getting involved in some way with the Communist Party.

Socialists?...

All of this would not matter so much if Italy had a Socialist Party that could do the same things for the Christian Democrats. But it does not, and that is another stubborn fact the election will probably not change.

Most election estimates have the Socialists remaining about where they were in 1976--9.6 percent--or gaining slightly. But even a sharp Socialist increase, say to 13 or 14 percent, would not solve the Socialists' basic problem: a deep split in the party over whether its interests are best served by alliance with the Christian Democrats or one with the Communists. Although the Socialists' ambivalence has an ideological dimension, it also reflects tactical differences; some Socialists argue that being in the government is the only way to avoid domination by the Communist Party, while other Socialists put more emphasis on the risk the party would run if it permitted the Communists to criticize freely from the opposition.

All Socialists seem agreed, however, that the decade they spent in center-left coalitions with the Christian Democrats damaged the party materially and morally, and thus that an old style center-left government is not a possibility this time around. What they seem to be groping for is some way of joining the government without exposing themselves to either Christian Democratic inroads or Communist sniping. Party chief Craxi, for example, favors a renewed alliance with the Christian Democrats but is insisting on near-parity with them--he has made it clear that the possibility of a Socialist prime minister should get a hard look. As regards the other side of the spectrum, Craxi has hinted, and leftward-

looking Socialists have stated more directly, that the Socialists want some arrangement to neutralize Communist criticism, such as a programmatic accord involving the Communists in the formulation of government policies.

It seems highly unlikely that the Socialists will get much of what they want. Few Christian Democrats are willing to consider a parity arrangement with them, if only because parity would narrow the Christian Democrats' patronage base. And while the Communists may ultimately settle for some kind of programmatic accord, the PCI would be wary of any arrangement that merely propped up a new center-left rather than increasing the Communists' own role substantially. Moreover, unless Craxi secured major concessions from both big parties, it would be an open question whether he could bring his party into any governmental arrangement without splitting it. In fact it seems likelier that the "big two" would negotiate directly with each other over the Socialists' heads--and to their detriment.

...Or a Center-Right?

Implicit in this analysis is the question of whether Italy can be governed without the left. This was not a possibility with the outgoing Parliament, because the smaller parties--minus the extremists--were not strong enough to give the Christian Democrats a majority without either the Communists or the Socialists. But what if the smaller parties next month gain the few percentage points required to permit a center-right majority?

In that event, the possibility of a center-right coalition would certainly be debated. It is extremely doubtful, however, whether such a coalition could govern effectively or for long. For one thing, the Communists would not greet it with the benevolence to which the country has become accustomed. They would see it as a fundamental change of course and, just as they did when the Christian Democrats last tried such an arrangement in 1972, would fight it strongly in and out of Parliament. And the parties that would participate in such a government--Christian Democrats, Social Democrats, Liberals, and Republicans--would have trouble maintaining a united front on major policy questions. The Social Democrats, for example, differ from the Socialists only in their opposition to Communist participation in the government and would find themselves at loggerheads with the fiscally conservative Republicans. And the coalition's narrow majority would accentuate the problem posed by the "sharpshooter" phenomenon in the Christian Democratic Party--the

tendency of dissenting factions to defect in secret parliamentary balloting on controversial issues. There are signs that the ill-fated center-right coalition of 1972 at one point had to rely on Neo-Fascist votes to pass the government's budget.

Three major conclusions flow from the foregoing analysis:

-- *Although many uncertainties surround the election, the results do not seem likely to fundamentally alter the political balance of power in Italy;*

-- *It will nonetheless be extremely difficult for the political parties to effect a compromise solution after the election, and a prolonged period of maneuvering seems a near certainty. There will probably be a tendency to postpone major decisions until after the Christian Democratic Party congress in the fall, so a temporary caretaker government is a distinct possibility;*

-- *When the dust settles, however, the Communist Party will almost certainly have at least as great a role in the governing process as it has in the last three years (S)*

This prospect suggests we ought to take a hard look at where the PCI stands today.

The State of the PCI

In considering the current state of the PCI, three general areas seem worth exploring: the party's internal life, its goals in Italy, and its views on foreign and security policy. The literature on these subjects is vast and no attempt will be made here to deal with them in an encyclopedic fashion. Rather, the aim will be to focus on the aspects of those questions that have been of greater concern to Italy's allies in recent years, and to determine how--if at all--the party has been changing in these areas.

Inside the PCI

In recent years, observers of the Italian scene have paid increasing attention to the way the PCI organizes itself and makes party policy. The central question has usually been: is the party still essentially a Leninist organization, tightly controlled from the center by a narrow leadership group, or is it becoming more "democratic?"

Why should the US be interested in this question? First, because it is more answerable than many of the other questions about the PCI, which are mostly future-oriented and likely to be answered only by time and experience. Moreover, the PCI's internal operation may hold clues to these other questions; knowing how the PCI runs itself, for example, should suggest how much dissent it would tolerate as a government member, whether it would work for the elimination of other parties or would foster cultural diversity and political pluralism. And from a policy standpoint, having a feel for how centralized and authoritarian the PCI is should tell us something about how predictable it would be as a government party--whether its positions would emerge and change slowly or whether the party has the capacity to shift gears overnight, with possibly adverse consequences for US interests.

But anyone trying to gauge the degree to which the PCI has become democratic must be alert to many potential pitfalls. At the most basic level, any such attempt inevitably runs into normative problems similar to those encountered by students of comparative politics as they sought in the late 1960s to determine the socio-economic preconditions for democracy. They found it extremely difficult, for example, to settle on a definition of democracy that fit a wide range of culturally diverse societies.

Democratic Centralism

That is one reason why it is inadequate to answer the question "Is the PCI democratic?" with the standard response: the party is not democratic because it retains the Leninist practice of democratic centralism--which in its current Soviet usage means that policy is set exclusively by a party hierarchy, after a debate that is sharply limited both in terms of its participants and the scope of the questions under discussion. Once the hierarchy makes a decision it brooks no dissent from lower levels and gives no effective voice to minority views. The issue of democratic centralism is of prime importance but it clearly is not enough merely to hang the label on the PCI. It is essential to ask at least two further questions:

-- How do we know that democratic centralism is at work in the PCI?

-- In what ways, if any, does the party's use of the concept differ from the way it is used in other Communist parties--or from the way some non-Communist parties behave?

We know the PCI operates by the principle of democratic centralism because in the first place the party says--indeed insists--that it does. Most recently, at the 15th party congress in early April, the PCI proclaimed the value of democratic centralism for a party seeking to "transform the foundations and class nature of a society and the state...". This came in the course of a labyrinthine ideological discussion in which the party reaffirmed the importance of Marx, Engels, and Lenin but emphasized it did not view their thought as a doctrinaire system.

Because the party so describes itself, however, is no reason to assume that no further questions need be raised. After all, the party might retain the label after it had radically altered the practice: to do otherwise would cost the PCI support among militant leftists and probably would cause an identity crisis for a party which has already been having enough trouble demonstrating that it is different from other Italian parties.

In fact, however, there is ample evidence that democratic centralism, or something very much like it, does operate in the PCI. The party does not have the sharply delineated and highly organized factions that characterize most other Italian parties, especially the Christian Democrats. Communist party congresses are generally smoothly-run affairs with few surprises and no organized minority in evidence; the party leader, who is chosen by the central committee, does not have to worry about being replaced through a popular vote at the congress. And there is a greater tendency than in other Italian parties for Communist leaders to adhere to a "party line" in responding to questions about sensitive foreign and domestic issues; the use of io--the first person singular--is still less common among Communist leaders, who tend more than other Italian politicians to talk in terms of "we" or "the party." Moreover, there is always a close connection between the attitude of local Communist politicians and those of party headquarters. Following the PCI's exit from the national governing majority in January, for example, local Communist leaders pulled out of similar regional arrangements in Lombardy, Campania, and Sicily.

But at the same time, there is ample evidence that democratic centralism in the PCI does not work in the stereotypical fashion. Despite the party's taboo against factions, there are distinguishable currents of opinion in the PCI, and adherence to them is one of the criteria party leaders consider when apportioning influential party posts. It is difficult to label these PCI "factions" accurately because, to a greater extent than in other Italian parties, they stem from conflicting ideas rather than personality differences

or patronage disputes. And sorting out these groups is made all the more difficult by the fact that foreign and domestic policy positions do not always fall into neat categories, i.e., "hardliners" on domestic strategy are not necessarily pro-Soviet and vice versa.

Nevertheless, it is possible to distinguish a "revisionist" group, which is less bound by traditional Communist precepts and more inclined to favor compromises designed to make the existing system work, and which looks mainly to PCI elder statesman Giorgio Amendola as its leader. Then there is the "new left," a group more orthodox on domestic policies--but not necessarily in its view of the Soviets--which centers mainly on Chamber of Deputies President Pietro Ingrao. There is another group of relative "hardliners"--Giancarlo Pajetta, Armando Cossuta, Tullio Vecchietti, and Dario Valori--who are distinguished more by their stronger pro-Soviet sympathies than by their advocacy of a particular domestic strategy. Berlinguer and his group are middle-of-roaders on all these issues--one of the main reasons why he is party leader.

e specific procedures for making party policy in the PCI re ot exactly dictated from the center, as in the CPSU.

ntroversial issues and has continually sought to gauge the membership's mood. We notice the leadership's response to the base's mood only on dramatic occasions--Berlinguer bringing down the government two years in a row, partially in response to dissatisfaction among PCI supporters with government policies. But it is reasonable to assume that rank-and-file views are factored into party policy in more subtle ways as well.

That is certainly the impression gained from a series of interviews which an American political scientist conducted with PCI politicians several years ago.* While Communist politicians were found to be more attached to party life than other Italian political leaders, theirs was not an uncritical loyalty. They stressed the importance of discussion and persuasion, suggesting that their loyalty was not to the orders of the leader but to the consensus within the party as an organization.

*Robert Putnam, "The Italian Communist Politician" in Communism in Italy and France, Donald Blackmer and Sidney Tarrow (editors), 1975.

The study also found the Communist respondents generally stronger than other Italian politicians in their support for certain democratic values--increased participation by ordinary citizens in politics and government, hostility to elite management of political affairs, equality of opportunity. But they were not so committed to other elements of liberal democracy--the rule of law, limited government, free speech. In short, the Communists thought maximum equality and participation more important than political competition and civic freedoms. This is not very reassuring to civil libertarians, but it is worth noting that this latter characteristic is one the Communists shared with many respondents from the governing parties.

Discipline and Communication

Moreover, the party's use of democratic centralism does not mean that party leaders are punished for speaking out against the party line to the extent that they are, for example, in the CPSU or the French Communist Party. The older, more established PCI leaders in particular are prone to critical outburts when Berlinguer does something they regard as offensive. For example, former party chief Luigi Longo grumbled publicly in 1973 about the dangers of "compromising" with the Christian Democrats after Berlinguer had unveiled his "historic compromise" strategy. Before the 1975 congress, Amendola--who wanted Berlinguer to accelerate the PCI campaign for government membership--complained bitterly in public that the secretary general was stifling debate in the party. And Umberto Terracini, the PCI elder statesman who served as president of the constituent assembly that wrote the constitution in 1946, argued while Berlinguer was supporting the government that the PCI really ought to be in the opposition--because the workers did not understand the party's policy.

It can be argued that the party is engaging in a harmless practice--allowing oldtimers with little organizational clout to vent their frustrations. But the PCI leaderships' acceptance of this sort of criticism contrasts sharply with the practice in parties like the PCF and CPSU, where leaders are less tolerant and where elder statesmen and retirees become political nonentities.

Also typical of the PCI in this respect is the way that Berlinguer has analyzed the troubles the PCI has experienced in the last couple of years. One of the prominent themes in his speeches has been the need to increase communication in the party--and not just from the top down. The theses for the recent congress also reflected that theme when dealing with

democratic centralism. The congress did not make any sweeping reforms in this respect, but it did recommend organizational changes, such as the creation of a "national council," that would stimulate criticism and debate at all party levels and broaden individual contributions to the decisionmaking process in the party. In a demonstration of convention-floor democracy, amendments to some congress theses were put to a vote and, for the first time, there were clear divisions rather than unanimous approval of the texts as developed in commissions dominated by the party hierarchy.*

This response contrasts markedly with the way the French Communists have reacted to similar pressures. The French have decided to tighten up internally, and they viewed the reaffirmation of democratic centralism as one of the most important aspects of their party congress earlier this month. Prior to the congress, local party leaders were called in and questioned by the party hierarchy on their political views. Those who did not hew to the party line were removed from their posts. The party's dissenting "intellectuals"--who oppose the PCF retreat to orthodoxy--were not even allowed to attend the congress.

There is no evidence of such a systematic weeding out by the PCI in recent years. In fact, the most analogous PCI event was the expulsion of the Manifesto dissident group in 1969. But it is also worth remembering that the Manifesto group was ideologically and programmatically more orthodox than the PCI leadership and that it accused the PCI essentially of selling out to the existing system.

Judging the PCI's democratic credentials must also take into account the tendency of other Italian parties to behave in ways that do not

The congress also eliminated the formal requirement that the party faithful study the works of Marx, Lenin, and Engels, although it reaffirmed the value of their work as analytical guides and research tools. In addition, the congress removed Marx, Lenin and Engels from their central dominating roles in Italian Communism and placed them on a par with Italian Communist theoreticians such as LaBriola, Gramsci, and Togliatti. Although the congress thus failed to go as far as the Spanish Communists, whose congress last year struck "Leninist" from the party's self-description, it did not represent a PCI "involution," as some observers have suggested.

seem particularly democratic. One might say, for example, that the PCI could be considered more democratic if its leader was elected freely and directly by the delegates to the party congress--but for the fact that the Christian Democrats began doing that only at their last congress in 1976; before then, Christian Democratic leaders were chosen through factional bargaining in the party's national council. Or we could take the advice of an American scholar who claims that the real test of democracy is "whether evidence exists that dissent is permitted and protected as legitimate political behavior."* But if that is the criterion, how do we square it with Amintore Fanfani's summary dismissal of the Christian Democratic youth leaders for criticizing his policies in 1974--or with Aldo Moro's treatment of the "Group of 100", the Christian Democratic dissidents who opposed his decision to bring the PCI into the national governing majority early last year? Moro and his associates not only made the group knuckle under to his decision but also took a vindictive approach in the aftermath. Moro played a decisive role, for example, in having the group's leader ousted from his job as Christian Democratic leader in Milan province. These things go on, of course, in the PCI as well, but taking a close look at Italy's other parties does suggest that in at least some respects the PCI is not very different from them.

Still, the overall impression gained from reviewing PCI policy is of a party that has yet to come to grips with some fundamental contradictions. On the one hand, it wants to hold on to its Leninist heritage; on the other, it wants to prove the party is immune to the excesses that seem inherent in the concept. The ambivalence is especially evident when Italian Communists talk about political pluralism and about what Italy will be like after the "socialist transformation." They claim there will still be room for other political parties after class interests are eliminated, because in Italy parties are the expression not only of class interests but of ideological, cultural, and religious differences that will survive the "transformation." But most PCI theorists who talk about the future put more emphasis on synthesizing various points of view rather than on tolerating them. They continue to speak of hegemony--albeit "hegemony based on consensus." And some might argue that this formulation is not very different from democratic centralism as now practiced by the PCI.

*Jorgen Rasmussen, *The Process of Politics*, 1970.

But these ideas themselves are markedly different from what most other Communist parties espouse. Moreover, it seems reasonably clear that the party is genuinely wrestling with the fundamental contradiction between "democracy" and "centralism." Over the postwar period, it has evolved a fair distance from the classic Leninist model. And the pressures still pulling it in this direction--a desire to hold on to its socio-economically diverse constituency and to broaden its appeal, the need to gain acceptance among Italy's other parties and its allies--may eventually become greater than the forces that tie the party to its past.

The Domestic Policy Arena

Berlinguer has always been quick to turn back any suggestion that the PCI is becoming a social democratic party. He and other PCI leaders insist it is and will remain a Communist organization. They say, however, that they reject all existing models, both social democratic and Communist, and want to transform Italy--via a uniquely Italian "Third Way"--into a "truly" socialist society.

But, however much PCI leaders may desire such a transformation--and the goal does seem more than a rhetorical one--they have not yet figured out the details of how to achieve it. To be sure, the Communists' pronouncements, and even their conception of "democracy," tell us something about the "ideal world" they have in mind: an egalitarian socialist society characterized by mass political participation, with consensus prevailing over conflict. And in contrast to the vagueness of its long-term goals, there is an abundance of data on what the party would like to accomplish domestically in the near and medium-term. We have the party's concrete actions during the period when it participated in the formulation of government policy under Andreotti. There is also a large body of PCI literature which lays out the party's views.

Perhaps the most comprehensive such statement is the medium-term plan published in mid-1977. Although parts were written with an eye to critics and skeptics, the plan was more than just a public relations effort. There were serious arguments over its merits among the party's economic experts, who took more than a year to produce it.

The plan set out the Communists' "maximum objectives" for a period of about five years. Party spokesmen argued that this focus is realistic given Italy's economic situation; but of course it also permitted the party to remain vague about its longer-term plans for "transforming" Italian society.

The Plan's Prescriptions

In the plan, the PCI sees no alternative to austerity over the short run. It advances its proposals as a follow-on program that would bring about stable economic growth and social progress. Perhaps its most striking features are its emphasis on extensive domestic economic planning and a shift away from protectionist measures earlier favored by party economists. Although the plan calls for some potentially far-reaching changes, it stops well short of proposing radical solutions to Italy's problems.

The Communists tout comprehensive economic planning as the fundamental solution to Italy's economic problems. Yet their program expresses the objective of "upgrading" and "rechanneling" the activities of the free market rather than supplanting it. Their proposed system of planning would focus on control of large-scale industry.

The Communists claim they would develop and impose economic plans through the legislative mechanism, with regional authorities playing a major role. Unlike their French counterparts, they do not call for outright nationalization of industry. In some undefined way, the bureaucracy would use "levers of direct and indirect public intervention" to ensure that economic units follow plan directives. The Communists foresee worker surveillance playing an important role in policing business behavior.

The party favors government intervention to assure that investment promotes both import substitution and job growth. It recommends that investment be directed into labor-intensive service activities rather than into the capital-intensive manufacturing sector. To foster job creation in the backward South, the Communists propose a freeze on job levels in northern cities. (U)

The party would enhance labor mobility through special assistance to people between jobs. For the workers, the Communists recommend higher take-home pay and a reduction of fringe benefits and social insurance.

The program includes a call for tight control of multinationals and for closer supervision of state corporations to promote efficient operation. The Communists also advocate government review of pricing decisions.

The plan envisions greater investment in agriculture, reactivation of fallow land, and replacement of small family farming units with cooperatives. Communist economists hope to raise farm production and to reduce Italy's large trade deficits in food, which they regard as a drag on industrial growth.

According to the program, the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Community has exposed Italian agriculture to damaging competition from other EC members and is the main obstacle to Italian self-sufficiency in food. The party demands "a profound change in the mechanism on which EC policy rests."

Regarding foreign economic policy, the Communists flatly rule out protectionism. The Communists express concern that EC integration has slowed and attribute this to the different balance-of-payments performances of the member states. As a remedy, they suggest joint management of EC members' foreign exchange reserves.

The party proposed that the EC expand its cooperation with Third World and Communist countries. In North-South relations the Communists advocate commodity stabilization pacts, debt relief for the poorest nations, and trade concessions to developing countries.

In the area of public finance, the medium-term plan strikes a rather conservative note, stressing measures aimed at reducing budget deficits. It states that deficit financing should be restricted to capital projects. The plan recommends greater effort against tax evasion, higher and more progressive taxes on income and wealth, and curbs on public spending.

To hold down government expenditures, the Communists would abolish certain agencies that have been prime sources of patronage for the Christian Democrats and would put a freeze on the hiring of administrators. The party would lower payroll taxes for social insurance, making up the revenue loss with heavier direct taxation. It would reduce the present large deficits in the social insurance system by scaling down health benefits, imposing some charges for medical services, and tightening up the policing of claims for disability pensions.

For the most part this program is decidedly non-revolutionary. It attempts to find real solutions to real economic problems, within the current Italian framework. It is of course open to criticism: on the political plane, for example, it demands sacrifices of the Christian Democrats' patronage apparatus while steering clear of issues that are delicate for the PCI; it merely makes vague exhortations to greater productivity and offers promises of voluntary wage restraint once the "grand transformation" has been achieved. And as in earlier PCI statements, little is said about the escalating deficit spending of regional and municipal governments, many of which are Communist-controlled.

Moreover, the plan seems misguided in its focus on agricultural self-sufficiency--a goal that could be achieved only by a wasteful propping up of the farm sector. Notwithstanding its abjuring of protectionism, in fact, the plan seems to downplay potential gains from trade; it presses for the expansion of import substitution industries to the exclusion of export industries. Policies such as these, however, may mean simply that the party still lacks the expertise to appreciate the limitations of autarky; the fact that it no longer favors protection may indicate that it is gradually coming to grips with such questions.

The most controversial part of the medium-term plan is the section on economic planning. The call for governmental control of the economy is broader and more strident than in earlier Communist pronouncements. The Communists would use economic planning to divert resources into activities to which the party assigns high priority. To this end, the Communists seek greater government influence in pricing, employment decisions, credit allocation, and investment.

With all its practical shortcomings--which often are revealing in themselves--the medium-term plan remains the clearest indication of what Communist thinkers come up with when they wrestle with Italy's mammoth economic and social problems. Most of the ideas were echoed in the various documents produced by the PCI congress last month, although the congress put much more emphasis on the difficulty of protecting working class interests while moving toward these goals.

The Plan in Context

The plan was, of course, not conceived in a vacumm. The year during which it was developed was a period of cautious experimentation for the DC and PCI; both were probing the limits of the governing arrangement worked out after the 1976 election, when in exchange for a vaguely-defined consultative role the PCI had agreed to support Andreotti's DC government indirectly by abstaining in Parliament. This was the least hostile and most productive phase of the flirtation. The major leaders in both parties seemed convinced that the potential advantages of the deal outweighed the risks, and the result was parliamentary approval for an economic austerity package that was relatively tough by Italian standards.

The main feature of that package was a series of tax increases and public utility hikes. Although labor refused to permit tampering with the mechanism providing for automatic cost-of-living wage increases,

Andreotti was able, with PCI help, to win approval for a temporary and partial freeze on the wages of higher paid workers, curbs on absenteeism, greater labor mobility, the abolition of several holidays, and pledges of restraint in some company-level wage negotiations.

Labor costs have continued to rise in the last three years, but many Italian businessmen say the PCI's involvement brought a period of economically beneficial "labor peace." Berlinguer was increasingly concerned in this period that he might not be able to extract adequate policy concessions from the Christian Democrats--indeed, this concern was one of the motivating forces behing the medium-term plan. But he also demanded formal negotiations with the DC on a programmatic accord for the government--negotiations that were still in progress as the PCI put the finishing touches on the medium-term plan.

Just as that plan is the best existing statement of PCI program goals, the 1977 programmatic accord is the best indication of what emerges when the PCI's program ideas confront the DC's. It is thus worth glancing back at the program accord, because it was the last occasion on which the PCI and Christian Democrats negotiated seriously on concrete issues; the two government crises that followed--in January 1978 and January 1979--were so dominated by political issues that the government economic programs accompanying the crisis settlements were little more than refinements of the 1977 accord.

What can we conclude from a review of the program accord? The PCI and DC were able to make a promising beginning in some areas but had to dodge the hard questions in others. The agreement was full of specifics on economic policy, for example; it gave Andreotti a mandate for continued austerity, and it specifically endorsed the International Monetary Fund's guidelines for Italy, such as a reduction of the budget deficit, reallocation of resources from consumption to investment, and the reduction of unit labor costs.

Although the accord stopped short of recommending fundamental reform of the wage escalator mechanism, it stressed the need for increased productivity and included provisions for increased labor mobility. To implement other economic aspects of the agreement, the parties proposed a ceiling on public spending by national and local authorities, restoration of limited taxing authority to local governments, a reduction of social insurance costs through a variety of means, and a temporary freeze on public sector hiring at both the national and the local government levels. And a variety of fiscal measures were envisioned to further dampen domestic consumption, stimulate investment and create new jobs.

The agreement was also quite specific on law-and-order measures but grew very fuzzy when talking about more politically divisive issues such as reform of the education system, changes affecting control of the printed and electronic media, and new procedures for personnel appointments in the public sector--perhaps the touchiest issue of all.

What Went Wrong

Most of the proposals in the programmatic accord never got off paper. The reasons are complex but involve mainly the resistance that grew in both the parties to the cooperation developing between their leaders. First, the PCI's labor supporters argued the party was getting little in return for its support of austerity measures. Such labor pressure was a key factor in Berlinguer's decision in late 1977 to topple Andreotti's cabinet and push for a more direct PCI role. After two months of tortuous bargaining with the late Christian Democratic leader Aldo Moro, Berlinguer got what he wanted--formal membership in the government's parliamentary majority, a status Berlinguer had long regarded as the last way station before PCI cabinet membership.

The programmatic accord seemed back on track--and then Moro was kidnapped by the Red Brigades terrorists on the day the new government was to take office. In this chaotic period--Moro was murdered by the Red Brigades two months later--law-and-order issues dwarfed everthing else, and economic policy was simply put on the shelf. Moro, Italy's most commanding political figure, had concluded that DC-PCI cooperation was the only way out of Italy's political dilemma, but when he was no longer around to defend this vision, his opponents in the Christian Democratic Party dug in their heels. This in turn fed the Communist rank and file conviction that cooperating with the DC was a losing proposition.

Among the conclusions that might be drawn from this experiment, however, three seem particularly important:

-- *Although PCI leaders cherish the notion of a "socialist transformation" in Italy, they are willing to run the political risks required to deal pragmatically with Italy's immediate problems--but only if convinced such cooperation carries a political quid pro quo.*

-- *The Christian Democrats are willing to compromise programmatically with the PCI and make political concessions--but only if convinced they have no alternative.*

-- *It would be premature to declare the Moro-Andreotti experiment a failure inasmuch as the two foregoing conditions were in effect for no more than three or four months in the period after the July 1977 program accord was concluded.*

Foreign and Defense Issues

Berlinguer recently told his critics that it is simply impossible to "measure in centimeters" the PCI's proximity to various countries. Although indisputable, Berlinguer's complaint is unlikely to mute the controversy that has long raged over PCI foreign policy. The debate has been confused by exaggeration on both sides. Some have suggested that the party's moderate stands on certain foreign policy issues mean it no longer pays much attention to Moscow. Others assert that the party's policy choices are merely tactical and that it acts as a "Trojan Horse" for Soviet foreign policy. And on both sides, there is a misleading tendency to assume that PCI foreign policy is a zero-sum game, in which a move away from Moscow equals a move toward Washington and vice versa. But in truth the game is much more complex, containing a far larger dose of ambivalence and uncertainty than any such simplifications.

PCI-Soviet Relations

The Soviets seem to view the Italian situation with mixed emotions. On the one hand, they probably hope that the PCI's growing influence will further some of Moscow's long-term interests--enhancing the respectability of Communist parties in Western Europe and elsewhere, nudging Italian foreign policy toward a more pro-Soviet or at least a more neutralist stance, dividing Italy from its allies, and weakening NATO. But at the same time, Moscow worries that the possible reactions to the party's entry into the government--a diplomatic backlash in the West or a right-wing reaction in Italy--might damage Soviet interests by jeopardizing detente and perhaps making Italy an even less predictable place. And despite the many points on which Moscow and the PCI agree, the Soviets have genuine ideological differences with the Italian party and fear that its success could further dilute Soviet influence in the Communist world.

The differences between Moscow and the PCI have traditionally centered on the Italians' advocacy of autonomy for all Communist parties, on their rejection of the Soviet model of socialism, and on their criticism of the human rights situation in Communist states. All of these issues were sources of irritation during Berlinguer's last trip to Moscow in October.

[redacted]

But for all these differences, the PCI has many reasons not to desire a break with Moscow at present. First, such a step would cause serious internal problems for the party. Although more than 50 percent of the PCI's members joined after 1968--the period of increased PCI criticism of Moscow following the Czech invasion--many of the party's older members still find anti-Soviet comments highly offensive.* And beyond such practical problems, the party leadership also sees the

It is extremely difficult to gauge the extent of pro-Soviet sentiment in the PCI membership, and analysts have usually settled on 20-25 percent for the hard core of this group. Chances are that less sharply defined pro-Sovietism is more diffuse in the party. Much attention has been given recently, for example, to a poll conducted by a Bologna research institute in which 79 percent of the PCI members surveyed said they thought socialism existed in the Soviet Union. Most commentators have jumped from that figure to the conclusion that there is far wider support in the PCI for Moscow than previously believed. To put the figure in perspective, however, it is useful to look at a similar poll conducted a year earlier by DOXA, Italy's leading polling agency, in which a similar number of PCI respondents--73.6 percent--supported the PCI in its controversies with the Soviets. It is always risky to make too much of Italian poll data, but what these two surveys suggest is that a large part of the PCI is sympathetic to the Soviets without necessarily agreeing with them. Finally, when talking about the pro-Soviet factor in the PCI, it should be borne in mind that in addition to 1.8 million members, the PCI must be attentive to the additional 10 million Italians who vote for the party and who are not predominantly pro-Soviet. [redacted]

Soviet experience as an important component of the PCI's ideological heritage; there is no sign that the party's ideological revisionism has yet reached a point that would allow it to sever its Soviet ties without a severe identity crisis. Moreover, the party remains profoundly distrustful of the US and, as it surveys the role the US has played in postwar Italian politics, undoubtedly feels it has reason to.

To the extent that genuine differences with the Soviets exist--and the record makes clear that they do--the PCI's polite diplomatic style helps keep them from getting inflated beyond control. It is in the PCI's nature--perhaps its Italian nature--to emphasize compromise and persuasion and to avoid head-on collisions. Although some PCI leaders have [redacted] agreement with some of Spanish Communist leader Carrillo's ideas--he has gone so far as to say the Soviet system is not socialist--they deplore his blunt and abrasive manner--arguing that nothing is to be gained from antagonizing the Soviets. But the fact that the PCI's divergence from Moscow lacks Carrillo's clarity and boldness does not mean it is less credible. The typical PCI leader would simply argue that in the long run more will be accomplished by trying to bring the Soviets around to the PCI's point of view.

The recent PCI congress showed these conflicting considerations at work. In commenting on the congress, many observers have focused on Berlinguer's pro-Soviet rhetoric and the enthusiastic response it received from the delegates. Berlinguer did put more emphasis than usual on the historical importance of Lenin and the October Revolution; and he generally portrayed the Soviets as working constantly for peace while the US--although not exactly pilloried--was portrayed as provocative and interventionist.

However, the stress Berlinguer placed on such themes was not so great as to throw his speech out of balance. Read in its entirety--69 pages--the speech is a classic example of the PCI's nuanced, two-handed approach to complex and controversial issues. It is replete with "on the one hand, on the other" statements designed to give everyone in the PCI's diverse constituency something to agree with. For example, it is not long after hearing about Soviet virtues and the "crisis" of capitalism that the delegates are told about the "crisis factors" in the Communist world, where "there

are as yet no societies characterized as the loftiest development of democracy and freedom." And while "Comrade Brezhnev's peace speech" is credited with restoring international calm during the China-Vietnam conflict, the US and Japan are also complimented for their "moderation and prudence" during the affair.

In any event, the conventional interpretation of the congress as a decisive swing back toward Moscow seems off the mark. Viewed in the context of all that has gone on in the party and in Italy over the last year, Berlinguer's performance looks more like a tightrope act. Over the months leading up to the congress, excellent sources showed a sharp debate in the leadership between those who think the party should move further away from the Soviets--and closer to a social democratic stance on domestic issues--and those who are more concerned about tradition and think the evolution has gone far enough. Berlinguer's speech shows him once again as the pragmatic leader synthesizing all these points of view in an effort to unify the party prior to a critical election.

Berlinguer's complimentary treatment of the Soviets may have warmed his relations with Moscow and firmed up wavering support among some party militants, but it is doubtful that the congress gave Moscow cause to change its basic assessment of the Italian party. The PCI's latest bid for a governing role, Moscow continues to view the prospect with considerable ambivalence.

Thus the PCI-Soviet relationship is--like so much else about the PCI--highly complex and ambiguous.

[redacted]

The Italians' strong desire for polite and diplomatic relations is one reason why the Soviets, when talking about the Eurocommunist parties, tend to see the PCI as the best of a bad lot. But although Soviet appreciation for the Italians' tact and commitment to correct relations sometimes prevails in the relationship, suspicion is never far behind. [redacted]

Foreign Policy Issues

Soviet suspicion has probably been fed by the pragmatic approach taken by the PCI to certain foreign policy issues in recent years. In domestic politics, the PCI has for decades shown a willingness to accept realities, to make compromises, and to negotiate with allies and opponents. But during most of the Cold War years, the attitude on domestic matters contrasted sharply with the close linkage of the PCI's foreign policy line with Moscow's. Even today, the PCI's overall foreign policy--at least outside of Europe--remains strongly slanted toward Moscow's a tendency especially evident on Third World issues. Apart from any pressures that Moscow may--or may not--exert, these positions essentially reflect the PCI's assessment of the party's interests. It is, among other things, a way for the party to maintain its "revolutionary" and "internationalist" credentials among left-wing Italians inclined to mistrust its reformist compromising political style. [redacted]

In recent years, the PCI has brought its pragmatic calculus to bear on more foreign policy questions as these questions have become more closely related to the goal of getting a share of power and as the climate of detente has helped increase the party's room for maneuver. The tendency shows up mainly with respect to Western Europe and most clearly in the evolution of PCI policy toward the European Community. [redacted]

In 1957 the PCI was the only Italian party to vote against ratification of the treaty of Rome. But as it became clear that the EC was contributing to the growing prosperity of the PCI's working-class constituents, the party

first recognized the "reality" of the Community and then moved on to a positive appraisal of it. Today, few Italians question the PCI's commitment to European institutions, even though the party makes clear its desire to "democratize" the Community by pushing for a larger labor role in EC decision-making and working to make it more independent of the US.* [redacted]

The PCI turnabout on the EC doubtless began with the calculation that continued opposition would be counterproductive electorally; indeed public opinion polls showed that support for European integration was higher in Italy than anywhere else in the EC. In the process, many Italian Communists came to see participation by the party in EC affairs as a way of giving the PCI a visible role in a system that Italy's allies did not perceive as threatening. The PCI probably hopes in this way to forestall adverse reaction should it enter the government in Rome, and perhaps even to surround itself with West European allies who might help dampen any such reaction. [redacted]

The PCI's new posture toward NATO is another, if less developed, example of the trend toward pragmatism in its foreign policy. Until the late 1960s, the party line reflected all-out support for Soviet attacks on NATO. At the 1972 congress, however, the PCI announced that it "did not pose the question of Italy's leaving the Atlantic Pact" since such a development would upset the European balance of power. [redacted]

The PCI's switch, of course, reflected a realization that opposition to NATO posed a serious obstacle for the party's governmental ambitions. But it also reflected the leaders' perspective on global realities. The party appears to have concluded from the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and from its belief in "imperialist" responsibility for Allende's fall in Chile that the world was still basically bi-polar and that its earlier line calling for a near-term dissolution of both European blocs was just wishful thinking. The party was probably also influenced by its growing awareness that detente had become critical to the success of its domestic strategy and by evidence--such as West Germany's Ostpolitik and CSCE--that detente was occurring within the framework of the existing alliance structures. [redacted]

Since the initial PCI shift on NATO in the early 1970s, there have been two significant developments in the party's line on the Alliance. During the 1976 election campaign, Berlinguer made a statement implying that he

*The party's medium-term plan also makes it clear that the PCI intends to press Italy's economic interests within the EC: see above, p. 20. [redacted]

regarded NATO as a kind of shield behind which he could pursue his independent policies free of Soviet meddling. Berlinguer did not convey any great enthusiasm for NATO--he merely said it was useful. And he balanced this by noting that there were forces in NATO that were also trying to limit his autonomy.

Berlinguer has often said the Yugoslavs come close to a model for the PCI, and he may merely have been applying the formula of a Yugoslav foreign minister: "As Yugoslavs, we need the Americans to protect us from Russians. As Communists, we need the Russians to protect us from the Americans." Moreover, in trying to carry water on both shoulders, there is undoubtedly in Berlinguer's formulation an element of electioneering.

Nonetheless--and not for the first time--the election campaign precipitated a change in the public line that carried the PCI position a long way beyond its previous stance.

A further significant refinement of the party's NATO line came in late 1977, when it joined the other major parties in voting for parliamentary resolutions terming NATO and the EC the "fundamental terms of reference" for Italian foreign policy. The resolutions, reportedly negotiated at a high level among the major parties, have been conveniently forgotten by the non-Communist parties during the current campaign. Nevertheless, they stand as reminders that the PCI and the other parties can find common ground even on foreign policy if convinced, as they seemed to be in late 1977, that they are doomed to govern together.

Although Berlinguer has reiterated verbatim in the current campaign his 1976 statement, the PCI's commentary on the Alliance has remained rather vague. The PCI's broader rationale for accepting NATO seems to stem from a desire not to upset detente; anything that increases friction among the superpowers is seen as jeopardizing the PCI's domestic political strategy. The PCI also says it wants to reduce what it regards as the preponderant US role in the Alliance as part of its effort to achieve a Western Europe independent of both the US and the USSR. But how it would reduce US influence and how it would keep Europe independent of the Soviets if the US had a lesser role it has not said. And it takes a very narrow, legalistic, and territorially restricted view of the Alliance, opposing--as do Italy's other major parties--the use of Italian NATO bases for operations outside of Europe.

The PCI's parliamentary voting record on defense issues is also a mixed picture. During the period when it was pledged to support the government, it abstained on defense budgets and on army and navy modernization laws. It can be counted on to criticize NATO programs that have a clear offensive rather than defensive orientation or that rely on weapons systems produced with little or no Italian participation. Such NATO issues do not often come up for a vote in Parliament, however, so the PCI has often been spared difficult choices. When it does oppose such a program, the PCI is usually in the company of another major Italian party or interest group. For example, in opposing Italian participation in NATO's Airborne Warning and Control Systems (AWACS), the PCI was on the same side as the Italian Air Force, which argued that Italy could use the funds more productively to upgrade its own defense capabilities.

Further Change?

There have been few signs in recent years that the party is prepared to move beyond limited acceptance to a more positive level of support for NATO--or that its attitude toward the Soviets is evolving in a way that would hasten such a change. Although the PCI's views seemed to be evolving rapidly in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the pace seems to have slowed since about 1975.

This is not to say there has been no discernible movement in the last few years. For example, the PCI seemed to support Romania last year in its reluctance to spend more on defense as Moscow wished; L'Unita claimed the international situation did not warrant added expenditure by Warsaw Pact nations even if NATO had decided to increase expenditures. Meanwhile the PCI's specialized institutes have held seminars on the USSR and the Prague Spring, and produced several books on Stalin and the Soviet Union which cut deeper in their criticism of Moscow than the PCI hierarchy ever does in public.* And buried in Berlinguer's congress speech are some significant passages on the "new internationalism," in which he floated the idea of a "charter" to define the aims and principles of new movement, consisting of communists, socialists, social democrats, and liberation movements. Coming from a party that long ago dropped "proletarian internationalism" from its lexicon and which also says there is no longer an international communist movement, Berlinguer's "new internationalism" must be seen from Moscow as a distinctly unwelcome idea.

But despite such examples, the PCI clearly remains reluctant to take the kind of positions the US would regard as a definitive break with the party's Communist heritage. This reluctance reflects both tactical and ideological constraints. On the tactical plane, Berlinguer's rapid strides toward rapprochement with the Christian Democratic Party have left him with less room for similar maneuvers on the international stage. It has been hard enough for the rank-and-file to swallow Berlinguer's cooperation with the traditional domestic enemy; had he been moving at the same rate in the foreign affairs area--a process that would inevitably arouse concern in the party that he was moving toward the US, the traditional

*French political analyst, Pierre Hassner, asserts that the PCI leadership initiates and approves these activities, using party specialists in a pedagogic and exploratory way, to say what the leadership thinks but does not want to be committed to officially.

foreign enemy--Berlinguer would probably have had trouble holding the party together. Moreover, the PCI probably calculates that there are not many extra votes to be gained by a more pro-Western foreign policy stance, particularly since a further dramatic shift in this direction might mean corresponding losses on its left. And in any event, domestic issues have almost always overshadowed foreign policy in the competition for the favor of Italian voters--a factor that diminishes the domestic pressure for a further PCI evolution.

But beyond such tactical considerations, the PCI is also constrained by a world view in which the threat to its independence--and to Italy's--comes from more than one direction.

-- From the PCI's point of view, the most serious threat still seems to be the possibility of some kind of US intervention in Italy, presumably intended to undercut the PCI.

-- A second kind of threat comes from the restrictions on Italian independence which the PCI associates with NATO membership; the PCI worries, for example, that Italy could become involved in some conflict outside of Europe--in Africa or the Middle East--where the PCI's sympathies might lie on the other side.

-- Finally, the PCI, or at least the top leadership, almost certainly recognizes that the USSR also poses a potential threat to Italy and to the PCI--but one that to them seems less immediate, less well-defined, and mitigated by the various points the PCI and Moscow still have in common.

Concerning this third threat, Berlinguer's 1976 statement saying he felt "more secure" in NATO than he would in the Warsaw Pact is the closest he has come to directly acknowledging it. Some PCI leaders reportedly speak in private about a Soviet military threat, especially to Yugoslovia and, by implication, to Italy. But the scarcity of public statements like Berlinguer's indicates that the subject is an extremely difficult one for the PCI to discuss in the open. Just how difficut was suggested by the PCI's awkward and embarrassed handling of the Kampuchea-Vietnam-China conflict.

When Vietnam attacked Kampuchea, the PCI's first instinct was to look the other way; it clearly hoped it would not have to comment on why one "progessive" state, linked to Moscow, had attacked another, linked to China. When it realized it could not remain silent, the PCI's second instinct was to support the Vietnamese--and implicitly the Soviets--citing the need to correct "aberrations" in the Pol Pot regime. But the dangers of relying on that rationale became all too apparent to the PCI when China later invaded Vietnam, saying it had to teach the Vietnamese a lesson. The PCI almost immediately condemned the Chinese--and then began to rethink the whole affair. The result was apparent in Berlinguer's congress speech, in which he discussed the conflict in careful detail, scolding both Vietnam and China and emphasizing heavily the importance the PCI attaches to the principle of non-interference in the affairs of another state. [redacted]

Three points emerge from this review of how the PCI grappled with the Indochina issue. First, the party's cumbersome performance--sharply at odds with its normal handling of international issues--makes it clear that the PCI was wrestling with a serious ideological dilemma. Second, by coming down where it did, the PCI showed itself able to admit that, even among Socialist states, national interests can override ideological ties and threaten international stability. Third, it would therefore not take too much imagination for the PCI to conceive of a "socialist Italy," or even an Italy in which the PCI had only a coalition role, being threatened eventually by the USSR. [redacted]

However, we should not expect the Italian Communists to stand up anytime soon and announce this to the world--not only because they are not yet sure the threat from the East is as real as the one they still see in the West, but also because thinking about such things still cuts too close to their identity. Moreover, the party probably still has to worry about [redacted] Soviet meddling in its internal affairs; in 1968, the Soviets arranged for certain PCI sections to receive literature aimed at strengthening rank and file resistance to the PCI's criticism of the Czech invasion. [redacted]

Nevertheless, it is not inconceivable that the PCI might slowly come around to greater acquiesence in--and possibly fuller acceptance of--activities that strengthen Western defenses against the USSR. Again, the Yugoslav example is instructive. Despite their desire to maintain

smooth relations with the Soviets, the Yugoslavs are perfectly willing to buy sophisticated US weapons that are clearly intended for defense against the USSR. But there is another lesson in the Yugoslav case; Belgrade is willing to do this only so long as there is no publicity--which suggests the PCI will not submit easily to public "tests" of its allegiance to the West.

Foreign and defense issues are the aspects of PCI policy which lend themselves least to generalization. Several conclusions are suggested by the foregoing analysis, however:

-- *The main features of the PCI's foreign policy are:*

  -- *A desire to avoid international hostilities that might jeopardize detente;*

  -- *Advocacy of a more assertive and independent Italian foreign policy;*

  -- *A pronounced tendency to distrust US motives in international affairs and to give the USSR the benefit of the doubt, particularly outside Western Europe;*

  -- *A fundamental opposition to Soviet hegemony in Western Europe.*

-- *The US thus has ample cause for concern about the growth of PCI influence in Italy--but so do the Soviets;*

-- *The differences between Moscow and the Italian party are most intense on ideological questions, but they have the potential to grow in other areas the closer the PCI comes to a formal share of power;*

-- *PCI-Soviet differences seem likely to persist because vital interests are at stake on both sides--for the PCI its credibility with the Italian electorate and for Moscow the legitimacy of its style of socialism;*

-- *While it is possible that the PCI will become gradually less negative toward Western defense efforts, this will be qualified in two important ways:*

-- *The PCI has a genuine interest in minimizing its differences with the USSR and in ensuring that any further evolution away from Moscow is a gradual and long-term process;*

-- *The PCI wants to communicate with and understand the US, but in moving away from Moscow it does not see itself moving toward Washington; its goal is autonomy--autonomy for Italy, and for Europe, vis-a-vis both the US and the Soviets.*

-- *And finally, in foreign affairs as in the domestic field, the PCI's positions are laced with heavy doses of ambivalence and not a little inexperience. In its typically dialectical fashion, the party is certain to modify these positions in the light of experence, and to do so in ways that pose new challenges to both major powers.*